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ATTITUDES OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS TOWARDS
STUDENTS WITH PHYSICAL DISABILITIES

A Project
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
Rehabilitation Counseling

by
Farida Kazemi
June 1996

ATTITUDES OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS TOWARDS
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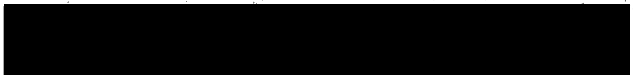
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June 1996

Approved by:


Dr. Margaret Cooney, First Reader

6/11/96
Date


Dr. Patrick Mullen, Second Reader

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ABSTRACT

Disability in general can be defined as physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities. In this project, 185 university students at California State University, San Bernardino were given a questionnaire to indirectly inquire about their attitudes in the following three areas:

- 1) The level of comfort with students who have physical disabilities,
- 2) The perceptions of students who have physical disabilities and,
- 3) The willingness to pursue social activities, dating and/or long-term relationships with students who have physical disabilities.

The findings reveal that overt discriminatory and prejudice attitudes are virtually absent among this sample of students towards students with physical disabilities.

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With appreciation to Dr. Margert Cooney for her assistance with this project. Her dedication and encouragement have helped me to attain my educational goal. She is my role model, and I will always remember her as an outstanding professor. I also want to thank Dr. Pat Mullen for his special help with this project.

To My Heroes:
My Mom Gaur Kazemi and
My late Dad Ghulam Reza Kazemi

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

There have been many studies conducted about students attitudes towards dating. Research by Donaldson (1980), Antonak (1980), Elston and Snow (1986), determined that although perceptions towards people with physical disabilities have improved within society, there is still a sense of uneasiness in personal interaction. A lack of regular contact with people who have physical disabilities makes it more difficult for people who are able-bodied to overcome stereotypes regarding physical disabilities. Although research has increased personal awareness about physical disabilities, little research has been conducted about students, who are able-bodied, social and dating attitudes towards students with disabilities. The purpose of this study is to explore the social and dating attitudes of university students who are able-bodied towards students with physical disabilities at California State University, San Bernardino. The following three areas of social interaction will be explored:

- 1) The level of comfort with students who have physical disabilities.
- 2) The perceptions of students who have physical disabilities.

3) The willingness to pursue social activities, dating, and/or long-term relationships with students who have physical disabilities.

Within this introduction, stages of interpersonal interaction, term definitions, and a historical perspective of attitudes towards people with physical disabilities discussed in detail. This chapter concludes by discussing society's changing attitudes toward the physically disabled.

Developmental Stages of a Social Relationship

The process of interpersonal attraction is the beginning stage of a relationship. Attraction motivates us to become more intimate with another person. According to Adler and Towne (1987) an intimate relationship proceeds through several stages:

The initiating stage involves each person showing the other a high interest in making contact and to show that the person is worth talking to. The experimenting stage involves searching for common ground with another person. The hallmark of experimenting is small talk. Small talk serves several functions:

- (1) it provides a way to find out what interests are shared with the other person.
- (2) it provides a way to 'audition' the other person.
- (3) it is a safe way to ease into a relationship (Adler

and Towne).

The intensifying stage is very important for an intimate relationship to be formed. Several changes in communication patterns occur during intensifying. The parties begin to see themselves as 'we' instead of separate individuals. It is during the intensifying stage that people begin to express direct feelings of commitment to one another. Studies have shown that people who share common interests have a propensity to develop an intensifying relationship (Adler and Towne). The intensifying stage is followed by the processes of integrating, bonding, and differentiating. A healthy relationship will feature these processes to sustain long-term intimacy.

However, some relationships reach a plateau of development, and then decline. In the circumscribing phase, communication between the couple decreases in quantity and quality. Rather than discuss a disagreement which requires some degree of energy and disclosure by both individuals, members often opt for physical separation. This stage results in a lack of interest and commitment. If circumscribing continues, the relationship begins to stagnate and jeopardizes its growth. The relationship assumes a hollow shell of its former self. When stagnation becomes too unpleasant, parties

in a relationship begin to put distance between each other under a guise of excuses. In either case, by this point, the relationship is ending. Termination usually follows, which can be either difficult or cordial. These components for an intimate relationship, along with a discussion of the stages of intensifying an intimate relationship, are applicable to people who are able-bodied. But, what about people who are physically disabled?

Several experts on dating imply that a physical disability may hinder the attractiveness of a person, especially in the initiating and experimenting stages. Robillard and Fichten (1983) explain that ninety-nine able-bodied college students provided information about their previous contacts with persons with disabilities. These students rated their degree of conformity with both physically disabled and peers who were able-bodied, and predicted the responses of physically disabled male and female college students who were physically disabled on a variety of measures. Factors in this study dealt with social anxiety, gender role stereotyping, romantic relationships, sexual attitudes, and sexual interest and behavior. Results indicate that students with physical disabilities were perceived as more socially anxious, less gender role stereotyped, and less likely to be dating. Males, unlike females, attributed greater interest in

sexual activities to students with disabilities than to students who were able-bodied. Results also indicate that comfort with students with disabilities was significantly lower than with students who are able-bodied (Robillard and Fichten p. 199).

The difficulties for people with disabilities involved in a romantic relationship is best explained by the lack of ease that are people who are able-bodied feel and probably convey to people who are disabled. Robillard and Fichten's study, as well as other studies examined in the literature review section, demonstrate that both male and female subjects report being less comfortable with physically disabled than with students who are able-bodied. This literature indicates that most people, including university students, find interacting with individuals who are disabled an anxiety-provoking experience. It can be assumed that if interaction makes students uneasy, dating a person with a disability may also be unlikely. Studies also indicate that major problems concerning sexuality faced by people with a disability are not directly caused by erroneous assumptions held by their peers who are able-bodied. They are probably due to a combination of inadequate opportunities in developing positive attitudes about one's sexuality and lack of available partners.

Influences on Social Attitudes Towards Persons With Disabilities

People with physical disabilities have experienced various forms of discrimination. Some of the most common causes of discrimination are fear, ignorance, lack of experience, and inflexibility (Pulton, 1976). Society becomes accustomed to a particular image and when someone or something does not fit this conceptionalization it is viewed differently. For example, an individual who does not have two hands may be considered different from the majority and be subject to indifferent treatment. Until recent decades, there were no laws on how to reduce discrimination against people with physical disability. Instead, stereotypes and false assumptions were generally accepted within mainstream society. For example, people who were confined to a wheelchair were not given sample opportunity to prove themselves in a conventional work setting. People with physical disabilities often had difficulty in establishing relationship with people who are able-bodied.

The Americans with Disability Act of 1990 (ADA) and other legislation has reduced the prospects of discrimination in the public sector. Throughout history, people with physical disabilities have encountered multiple forms of discrimination and stereotypes to prevent them

from gaining access to the mainstream of society. In the United States, this common discrimination has recently been redressed in federal legislation such as the 1975 Rehabilitation Act, the rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1992, and the Americans with Disabilities Act. This National legislation has addressed areas such as public education, accommodation, employment, and transportation needs.

Attitudes Towards People with Physical Disabilities

Until the passage of the ADA, people with physical disabilities experienced discrimination in society. Public accommodations were either nonexistent or very limited in allowing individuals to lead a normal life. Once public accommodations began to be established, people with physical disabilities were able to increase their mainstream into society by new standards of accessibility.

Widespread social and cultural norms, standards, and expectations often lead to the creation of negative attitudes toward the disabled population. The most frequently mentioned factors which contribute to negative stereotyping of persons with disabilities are:

(1) Emphasis on concepts such as, youth, health, athletic ability, and personal appearance and "body beautiful".

These highly stressed societal standards are often institutionalized into cultural customs that promote

conformity within society.

(2) Emphasis on personal productivity and achievement.

Individuals in most Western countries are judged on the basis of their ability to be socially and economically competitive.

(3) Prevailing socioeconomic factors that create an atmosphere within which attitudes toward individuals with disabilities are often nourished. It is found that the level of societal development, rate of unemployment, beliefs concerning the origins of poverty, and the importance attached to the nation's economic welfare and security are all contributing factors affecting attitudes toward people with disabilities.

(4) Society's labeling of people with physical disabilities as "sick," whereas, the occupant of the "sick role" is exempt from normal societal obligations and responsibilities, negative thoughts are associated with a long-term disability.

(5) The status degradation attached to disability. The social deviance and inferred stigma of having a physical disability weighs heavily on society's attitudes toward those affected.

The role which unfamiliar situations play in creating anxiety and confusion is emphasized by some researchers. It is noted that upon initial interaction with a person

with a disability, a person who is able-bodied does not know the appropriate way to conduct oneself since this is an unstructured situation in which socially accepted rules and regulations for proper interaction are not well defined. The person who is able-bodied interacting with a individual who is disabled faces uncertain social outcomes encountered by an unfamiliar situation. This discontinuity disrupts the established basic rules of social interaction and may cause an individual to avoid a similar situation or curtail interaction in a similar encounter in the future.

Changing Society's Attitudes Towards People with Physical Disabilities

Researchers have shown that discrimination against individuals with disabilities is least apparent in relatively impersonal situations but quite common in situations involving interpersonal relations or business affairs, For example, employment and marriage. There are three broad categories to consider in changing society's attitudes toward the physically disabled:

1) Contact 2) Information 3) Combining Contact with Information.

Contact

One procedure designed to promote attitude change is to encourage contact between the general public and

members of a disabled group. Studies investigating the contact dimension have presented two different ways. One method is to divide the subjects into groups simply on the basis of their self-reports about the amount of contact which they have had with a member of a disabled group, and to determine if differences exist in the attitudes of subjects differing in the amount of self-reported contact. The second method exposes the subjects to specific contact experience and makes an assessment regarding the effects of this observable contact experience based on the subjects' attitudes. The number of experimental studies on the effects of contact clearly demonstrate that contact alone does not significantly change attitudes toward persons with a disability.

Information

Attempts have also been made to change attitudes by providing people who are able-bodied with information about persons with disabilities. This information may take the form of a book, course, lecture, discussion, film, or an institutional tour. General agreement seems to exist among researchers that regardless of the way information is presented, the power of information alone does not result in a positive attitude change. It would appear that providing individuals with information about people who are disabled demonstrated only one obvious

effect which increases a person's knowledge about physical disabilities. However, merely having more information about this particular topic does not necessarily enable persons who are able-bodied to think more positively of people with disabilities.

Combining Contact Plus Information

Many researchers have attempted to change attitudes toward individuals with disabilities by combining contact experience with some type of information about the disability. The findings of these studies have been consistent. Regardless of the type of disability studied, and relatively independent of the type of contact and information experience provided, these studies reported that combining contact with information experience had a favorable impact on the person's who is able-bodied attitudes.

In a cross-section study about the effects of rehabilitation counselor training, Anthony and Carkhuff (1970) found that advanced students had more positive attitudes toward individuals with physical disabilities than entry-level students. This difference can be attributed to the fact that advanced students have had more contact and information about a physical disability than their less-experienced counterparts. Other studies have demonstrated that contact and information experience

clearly improve attitudes toward people with physical disabilities.

The implications of these studies are that the attitudes of persons who are able-bodied toward individuals with a disability can be influenced in a positive manner. This can be done by providing the persons who are able-bodied with an experience which includes contact with a person with disability and information about the disability. Personal exposure without information is not sufficient in having positively changing attitudes toward the disabled. Without information contact, there is only a limited positive effect and it may even reinforce existing negative attitudes. Similarly, information without personal contact increases knowledge about a disability but appears to have little or no effect on attitude changes.

Definition

Disability is defined as a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities.

Independent Living Skills refer to an individual's capacity to attend to his or her survival needs such as cooking, eating, and bathing.

The Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) gives civil rights protection to people with disabilities. It supports

and guarantees equal opportunity for people with disabilities in public accommodation, transportation, employment, telecommunication, and state and government services.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of the Literature

The literature review will provide pertinent information on the challenges that people with disabilities face in interpersonal relationships in society. Various studies will be cited indicating personal uneasiness is a factor which limits personal contact between individuals who are able-bodied and persons with disabilities. Two ways to promote communication and interaction are encouraging personal contact and educating the public concerning physical disabilities. Education will establish common ground for developing further socializing and dating relationships. The following three areas will be examined within the literature review:

- (1) The level of comfort with students who have physical disabilities,
- (2) The perceptions of students who have physical disabilities, and
- (3) The willingness to pursue social activities, dating, and/or long-term relationships with students who have physical disabilities.

Level of Comfort with Students who have Physical Disabilities

Donaldson (1980) asserts in her findings that despite improvements in attitudes toward people with

physical disabilities, there is still a sense of uneasiness through interaction by individuals who are able-bodied. Donaldson's research reveals a majority of people experience uneasiness, inhibitions, and uncertainty in their interactions with people who have physical disabilities. These personal feelings have a strong influence on the creation and perpetuation of negative attitudes toward disabled persons (p. 509). These findings relate to this study in that most people may struggle emotionally with the prospect of dating a person with a physical disability. In terms of dating or establishing an intimate relationship, uneasiness or uncertainty is the normal reaction of a female responding to a male with a physical disability. Furthermore, a female may view the a man who is disabled as a confirmation of a negative stereotype associated with helplessness or separateness. She may consider the prospect of sexual relations and think about his disabilities as a major obstacle.

Other research was conducted by Antonak (1980). whose research consisted of collecting responses of 326 university students to the 20-item Attitude Toward Disabled Persons (ATDP) Scale to explore psychometric properties and factorial structure of the scale. It was found that age, sex, educational level, professional specialization, and frequency of contact with persons

with disability did not contribute significantly to the prediction of total score. However, intensity of contact was the best predictor (p. 171). The purpose of Antonak's research was to determine if ATDP remains a useful instrument for the measurement of attitudes toward people with physical disabilities. He concluded that ATDP needs to be modified and updated to reestablish its psychometric quality due to profound changes in the areas of rehabilitation, social service, and special education (p. 175).

Elston and Snow (1986) conducted a study on determining the differences in attitudes toward people with disabilities among rehabilitation counselors, personnel at rehabilitation evaluation centers, and sheltered workshop personnel. An important reason for conducting this study was to identify demographic variables that may correlate with attitudes toward persons who were disabled. The selected variables included educational level, amount of work experience with people having disabilities, and the respondents' own disability status (p. 285). The Attitudes Toward Disabled Persons Scale (ATDP) was used to measure the general attitudes toward people with disabilities.

Royse and Edwards (1989) conducted a survey that suggested a discrepancy between commonly held notions

concerning willingness to discuss disabilities and the actual attitudes of persons with disabilities. Their interpretation of the data collected was that persons with disabilities are frequently open to disclosing but do not often ask about the disabilities of others or feel more at ease themselves after the disclosure (p. 203). The majority of respondents did not resent questions or felt that persons who were able-bodied were too inquisitive. However, the researchers did note that the study may be limited by the fact that the respondents tended to be well-educated and may have had more open attitudes toward disclosure than persons with lower levels of educational attainment (p. 207). The researchers of this study suggested further research that should employ a more representative sample of persons with disabilities.

Large (1982) interviewed people who were blind about their adjustment to their physical disability and what they thought the attitudes of others about blindness. The conclusions drawn were that the effect of other's attitudes upon a blind person were highly complex and individualistic.

Relevance of Research

The level of comfort that a person who is able-bodied has with someone who has a physical disability is dependent on many factors. Accepting someone's physical appearance

without dwelling on it is helpful in looking beyond a physical disability. A willingness to discuss a physical disability is a constructive approach that will raise the awareness of others. Other important factors include the degree of personal contact and knowledge about disabilities will facilitate communication between able-bodied and persons with physical disabilities.

Perceptions of Students with Physical Disabilities

Within this section, the author will address some of the perceptions that individuals who are able-bodied have which influence them to avoid establishing friendly relations with persons who have physical disabilities.

In a study carried out by Ossorio (1984) open-ended interviews were utilized with peers who were able-bodied (18-24 years of age). These interviews were used to identify feelings and attitudes held toward individuals who were paraplegic. Questionnaires based on these interviews were developed and administered to 300 undergraduate students who were able-bodied. These researchers identified two new factors that measure something different from traditional attitudinal measures such as ATDP (Attitudes Towards Disabled Persons). These two new dimensions of attitudes toward individuals who were paraplegic are a sense of discomfort and grateful curiosity.

A premise of Ossorio (1984) was that the Attitudes Towards Disabled Persons Scale that was developed by Yuker and Block (1979) was too general for the purpose of their study. Not only did it lack content in its questions, but it also did not view the disabled in a collective manner. Furthermore, these researchers clarified that there was very little information pertaining to this project that addressed the interpersonal adjustment of paraplegics. In particular, the formation of friendships with peers who were able-bodied. A lack of an acceptable measuring instrument prompted the researchers to interview able-bodied peers of people who were paraplegics. Once this information was obtained, an attitudinal scale could be developed that would focus on the issues relevant to the friendship formation process between the two groups.

The researchers discovered that the issues occurring with the greatest frequency in the interviews were classified in two major categories: factors discouraging friendships with people who were paraplegics and factors encouraging friendships with people who were paraplegics. In the first category, these researchers discovered that the peers who were able-bodied perceived such a friendship as requiring extra effort and sacrifice which would cause a sense of discomfort. Specifically, the following responses were frequently noted:

- (1) Peers who were able-bodied feared that such a friendship would be a burden because the person with paraplegic requires special attention, such as entering and exiting an automobile, or when going up and down stairs.
- (2) The activities to be pursued together would be constrained if a person with paraplegic was included. For example, playing a game of football or going to a concert would create a perception of requiring additional effort to accommodate the person with paraplegic.
- (3) Person who is paraplegic has lost his or her ability to be spontaneous in taking part in activities.
- (4) There is a belief that the life styles of an able-bodied and a person with paraplegic are so different that they have little in common.
- (5) Some students pointed out that they feel a sense of uneasiness involving interactions with people who are paraplegic because they are not considered normal.
- (6) Some people are concerned about what their friends would think if they were seen with individuals who are paraplegic.
- (7) People with paraplegics were removed from the mainstream of their peers who were able-bodied.

In relation to the second category, factors encouraging friendships with people with paraplegics,

these researchers found some interesting responses:

- (1) Curiosity is sometimes a motivating factor.
- (2) Some peers believe that they could learn more from a person with paraplegic than from a friend who is able-bodied.
- (3) Some felt that the friendship would be more highly valued by a person who is paraplegic because he or she may not have many friends due to their disability.
- (4) People with paraplegics are admired and respected, and consequently, are valued persons.
- (5) Both parties would open up and put more into the friendship.
- (6) Most peers seemed to think it would not be more difficult to develop a friendship with a person with paraplegic once they were introduced to one another.

Based on these responses, the researchers identified some procedures that would serve to allay common misgivings of their peers who are able-bodied. As an anticipated result, friendships with this particular population with disabilities would grow in number. Some of the specific procedures suggested by the interviewees included: learning specific ways in which one can be helpful, learning to relax around persons who are paraplegic, and being able to talk about their feelings and reactions toward individuals who are paraplegics.

Ossorio (1984) concluded that much of the negative affect and feeling of discomfort that have been observed in the interactions between people with paraplegic and people who are able-bodied may be due to uncertainty about appropriate role expectations and role enactments. These researchers emphasize that this premise is supported by data indicating that one of the best ways to overcome discomfort, fear, and prejudice toward people with disabilities is through direct and frequent contact.

Shepperd and Strathman (1989) have confirmed general data about members of each gender placing emphasis on physical appearance in selecting a romantic partner. These researchers found that a sample of subjects reported that shorter females were preferred more as dates, and females chose taller males as more attractive (p. 617). These findings suggest height is a bias in dating preferences. This investigation took a unique approach to the height-attractiveness question by collecting information pertaining to subjects' dating preferences and self-reported dating behavior, as well as by examining the subjects' evaluations of photographic evidence (p. 626). Taken a step further, it would be interesting to see how males and females react to a potential romantic partner with a physical disability. Based on this research evidence, it is likely a bias would develop in both gender

groups toward a person's physical disability. If these subjects had a preference for a romantic partner of a specific physical size, then there is a likelihood these subjects would prefer someone without a physical disability. All of these assumptions concerning people with physical disabilities are shaped by research evidence about the bias and prejudice rooted in general society.

Gellman (1959) discussed this problem extensively. He believes that social attitudes toward people with disabilities is reflected by discrimination within the family unit, custom, and by institutionalized values (p. 4). In the process of accepting the prejudicial conditions, a child with a physical disability, according to Gellman, becomes "fearful, insecure, and anxious and carries these emotional burdens with him or her throughout life" (p. 5). Also, people develop attitudes toward individuals with physical disabilities as being "non-producing" and of "low-status" (p. 5-6).

Yuker and Block (1979) report from extensive research on people with physical disabilities and their interactions in society that few people publicly report negative feelings or perceptions about people with physical disabilities. These researchers find that no matter how much prejudice a person holds against a person with a disability, he or she will not share this viewpoint in

public. However, this statements may be quite different (p. 19). This finding suggests that many people are prejudicial towards people with disabilities but would never display such an attitude or behavior in public. On the other hand, due to the internal prejudice of feeling and bias, such people are not going to view or treat people with disabilities as equals. In relation to this project, university students may harbor a prejudice and bias against fellow students with physical disabilities. This perception will not likely surface unless an individual is placed in a situation of being asked out by a person with a physical disability or pursued sexually by a person with a physical disability. At this time, it is likely an inherent prejudice would surface and a college student would decline the possibility of establishing a relationship.

According to Gellman (1959) the roots of prejudice against people with physical disabilities are definitely the starting point in trying to understand the depth of this prejudice. Both men and women with physical disabilities in college are going to find it difficult to overcome this prejudice. Gellman's emphasis that a social barrier exists because of a peer group mentality which leads both parents and children to avoid children with physical disabilities. This position will be

discussed in relation to other studies that will be presented in this section.

Another important point made by Gellman is that parents live in constant anxiety about having a child with a physical disability. When this occurs, Gellman believes that parents naturally feel guilty about this situation. Although many families adapt to the needs of a member with a physical disability, Gellman is trying to point out that prejudice exists even in the parents' initial reactions. They are feeling guilty about the outcome of the birth as a tragic situation. When a university student with a physical disability becomes attracted to a student without one, there is a strong potential for rejection.

Barocas and Hollenbeck (1991) discuss how parents treat children with conduct disorders. These researchers determined that psycho-social factors that mediate the risk of conduct disorder in children is a complex task. They found that distressed families (e.g. psychologically impaired parents) display even less cohesion, less expression, little emphasis on the development of individual dependence, and greater conflict. This environment creates an even more destructive prejudicial one for children with physical disabilities. In other research with younger children, these researchers noted

that parental variables were associated directly with intellectual development and school achievement than with individual behavioral adjustment.

Zilko (1991) explains that parents may respond in a number of different ways to the diagnosis of a disability or serious illness in their child. Zilko provides a series of stages that may help accept the condition of a child. Progress through these stages is suggested to be facilitated by a well-trained and empathetic counselor. An example is when a father buys a baseball and catcher's mitt for his newborn son, then finds out that the child has a physical disability. This loss of the fantasized child and discrepancy between these expectations and reality usually brings about a crisis reaction with feelings of grief and loss (p. 29).

Grauerholtz (1987) evaluated the link between perceived egalitarianism in dating relationships and several social-psychological factors that characterize intimate relationships. Grauerholtz found that various interpersonal values operate in intimate relationships that may disguise or counteract inequality in intimate heterosexual relationships. This researcher based her findings on a sample consisting of 201 female and 127 male college students who were involved in a non-martial heterosexual dating relationship. This results showed

that interpersonal values such as commitment, trust and other orientation are positively related to perceived egalitarianism. The degree of dependency an individual feels in the relationship is also related to perceived power. This researcher notes that individuals who believe their partners treat them as equals may find it easier to trust their partners and may also desire greater commitment (p. 568-569).

These findings point to the importance of moving beyond a social-exchange perspective in order to understand interpersonal power in an intimate relationship and to explore the relationship between interpersonal values and power. In respects to this study, people with physical disabilities are going to encounter an even more likelihood of being in a non-egalitarian intimate relationship. This assumption can be based on the fact that a person with a physical disability is going to have special needs compared to a partner without one. These special needs can range from limited dependence to total dependence on someone else. In an intimate relationship, any kind of special dependence is going to be translated by a partner as requiring a special type of commitment and trust from another person. College males and females, according to Grauerholtz, are able to establish trust and commitment in their non marital relationship, and

perceive their relationship as egalitarian. Although a person with a physical disability may share trust and commitment with a partner without a physical disability in an intimate relationship, the power balance or egalitarianism is going to be more difficult to achieve because of the disability.

Relevance of Research

Within the second area of the literature review, the perceptions of students who have physical disabilities was discussed. Various studies pointed out the inclusion of people with physical disabilities into society can be a difficult journey. People have a tendency to see only an outside appearance which keeps them from becoming more familiar with the person. The actual person feels somewhat isolated with their disability in which they do not enjoy as much personal contact with other people who were able-bodied. This situation becomes more difficult as the individual reaches adulthood and pursues an intimate relationship with a person who is able-body. Personal prejudice and a perception that the person is not equal in a relationship are some insecurities that are faced by the person with a physical disabilities. Now, attention shall focus on the third area of the literature review.

Willingness to Pursue Social Activities, Dating, and/or Long-Term Relationships with Students who have Physical Disabilities.

A willingness to pursue social activities, dating, and/or long-term relationships with students who have physical disabilities is the third area to be discussed in the literature review. Parental and personal support from friends are essential elements in assisting someone who has a physical disability to pursue a romantic relationship. Within this section, authorities will discuss the benefits of support networks, factors in dating behavior affecting college students, and efforts to alter attitudes toward people with physical disabilities.

Sprecher and Felmlee (1992) performed a three-wave longitudinal investigation to determine how support from parents and friends for romantic relationships of young adults affects the quality of their relationships. These researchers found that the female partner's perceived network support increased the stability of the relationships (p. 892). It is reasoned that gender differences in network's effects on relationship dissolution is that the female's social network is more active in attempts to control the outcome of her romantic liaison. In addition, it was reasoned that the significant effect of female network support on breakup rates signifies

that a woman's own network is adept at predicting the survival of her dating relationship (p. 899). This data can be related to the scenario of a person with a physical disability dating a young adult female and the potential negative reaction of her social support network to the survival of the romantic relationship due to the obvious burden that a physical disability places on the relationship. For example, a young adult female dating a male with paralysis from the waist down will be questioned by most people in her support network about handling the "burden" of her romantic partner's physical disability. She may feel pressured to breakup with him due to such react reaction.

In research studies undertaken by Simpson (1990) it was clarified that physical and sexual attractiveness is unique in that "it often acts as the first and sometimes only dimension on which interpersonal evaluations are based" (p. 1192).

This finding is relevant to this present study due to the implications for young adults with physical disabilities in dating and courtship during his or her college years. The research findings by Simpson et al support the data by Sprecher and Felmlee about young adult courtship concerning the importance placed on the physical appearance of a romantic partner

in the early stages of courtship and dating.

Prisbell (1987) identified eight factors in dating behavior affecting college students: conditioned anxiety, skills, apprehension, expectations, importance, activity, physical attractiveness, and proximity (p. 659). This researcher collected data from 200 undergraduate students by providing packets of communication instruments that measured their dating behavior in relation to these factors. Frequency of dating was closely correlated with five out of eight factors, with highest relationships associated with importance and apprehension factors. Moderate ones were linked with conditioned anxiety, physical attractiveness, and expectations of dating (p. 663). These results signify that there are a number of factors that affect approach-avoidance behaviors in dating. In a situation involving a person with a physical disability, a possible romantic partner may consider these factors in terms of his or her decision to date this person on a regular basis.

Margolin (1989) found in an experimental assessment of a sample of college students that cultural attitudes and structures affect intimate relationships both inside and outside the marriage bond. Margolin concluded that independent behavior was seen as less acceptable in marriage than in dating by both partners. However,

restrictions appeared to be greater for males in relation to doing non sexual activities without their partners (p. 101). The information for this study implies that university students of both genders are possessive of a romantic partner to a certain degree. Members of both genders were especially opposed to any sexual activities pursued by a romantic partner with a member of the opposite sex. When considering a person with a physical disability as one of the partners in a romantic bond, Margolin's findings may or may not be applicable. For example, a person with spinalcord injuries will not be viewed as a person in the romantic relationship who will be pursuing outside sexual interests. Also, a person with a physical disability may affect the decision-making of a college student contemplating marriage while dating.

Evans (1976) reports on the studies that have attempted to alter attitudes toward people with physical disabilities. He clarifies that they can be divided into two types:

- (1) those aimed at changing attitudes by providing increased contact with the disabled.
- (2) those that have provided increased information about the disabled as a means of a positive attitude change.

This researcher concluded that persons with disabilities

are the single most important agent in affecting the attitudes of people without disabilities in their social interactions. Evans found that persons with disability placed their non disabled counterparts at ease at the start of their social interaction had the greatest impact on refuting stereotypes and stigma applied to people with physical disabilities. By creating a positive image and displaying behaviors that lead to positive attitudes on the part of persons who are able-bodied, such individuals with physical disabilities had the greatest satisfaction from their jobs and lives (Evans, 1976). Their social interactions were marked by healthy, positive attitudes and perspectives.

Woll and Young (1989) examine the success and failures of video-dating for modern men and women. video dating is a type of dating service in which clients make their choices on the basis of a combination of written and videotaped information. This procedure usually consists of a client reviewing a form containing demographic information, self-descriptions, and photographs of prospective dates. These researchers interviewed 80 clients (40 males and 40 females) of a Los Angeles-based videodating service and found that all subjects specified physical attractiveness was highly important. However, women were more likely to mention that men are looking

for attractive women, while males were more likely to say that women were looking for financially secure or successful men. In a similar manner, subjects spent a great deal of time creating a positive first impression through the presentation of images in videotape material. According to researchers, the goal is to attract Mr. or Ms. Right.

This research is quite relevant to this project in terms of the importance given to physical attractiveness and personal image by both men and women. A man or woman with a physical disability is going to encounter some major problems in dating and intimate relationships if this same attitude and value scale is used by college men and women. The social values in American society are reflected in this particular study for both gender groups. Physical attractiveness is given a high priority in what a man or woman desires in a potential partner and in an intimate relationship.

Kaplan (1982) examined research regarding rehabilitation counselor toward clients. Some conclusions drawn from available data are that counselors tend to hold differing attitudes toward different client groups and these attitudinal differences affect service delivery to clients. Some researchers found that the more difficult the counselors perceived the client's rehabilitation to

be, the counselor tended to have a more negative attitude.

An interesting research study that Kaplan undertook in 1981 concerned testing 40 rehabilitation counseling graduate students for their attitudes toward an obese client versus the same client at normal weight. Results showed that normal weight of a client was rated significantly higher on the dimensions of competency, attractiveness, independence, and general evaluation. It was also determined that the ability of clients to complete their rehabilitation program was directly related to counselor attitudes toward them.

Dailey and Halpin (1981) undertook a study to determine if undergraduates attitudes toward the disabled would be positively modified by observing videotapes of children with handicapped. Fifty-two students with special education and non-special education majors who were enrolled in an introductory special education course were randomly assigned to either an experimental group that observed videotapes of disabled children or a control group that did not. The Attitude Toward Disabled Persons Scale (ATDP) and the Handicapped Sub Scale of the Special Vocational Needs Attitude Scale (SVNH) were used as pre-test and post-test measures. These researchers discovered that experimental group subjects had many more positive attitudes toward people with disabilities as measured

by the ATDP. On the other hand, a significant interaction of treatment and academic majors on attitudes toward people with disabilities, as measured by the SVNH, indicated that the treatment was differentially effective for special education majors and non-special education majors.

Based on these findings, Dailey and Halpin concluded that regardless of academic major, videotapes of children who were disabled should be used in conjunction with an introductory special education course for the positive modification of generalized attitudes toward the handicapped. However, they emphasize that the modification of specific attitudes toward the disabled is a more complex situation. According to researchers, inconsistent findings obtained for video and non-video special education majors on the SVNH provide no definite direction for those preparing teachers to work with special education students.

Belgrave (1984) undertook a study to examine the effectiveness of strategies that a person who is physically disabled can utilize to increase a person's who is able-bodied willingness to engage in social interaction. In the strategies, the person with a disability engages in behavior demonstrating that he or she is not preoccupied with the disability. An assumption of this study is that one social disability that person with disability confront is that persons who are able-bodied

tend to avoid social interaction in first encounters. Also, it is presumed that the avoidance of interaction with people who are disabled may be based on the anticipation of discomfort during the interaction. Persons who are able-bodied may feel discomfort when interacting with persons with disabilities because his or her presence makes it apparent that they are also vulnerable in becoming handicapped.

The results provide evidence regarding effectiveness of strategies for initiating interest in others, activities typical of persons who are able-bodied and an interest in athletic activities for promoting social interaction with a person who is physically disabled. The strategies of showing interest in athletic activities were aimed at demonstrating that a person who is disabled is not preoccupied with a disability. The assumption on which these strategies were based focused on persons who are able-bodied avoiding social interaction with a person with disability due to an anticipation of personal discomfort during the interaction. There is an uncertainty surrounding the disabled person's emotional reaction to the disability. The conclusion drawn by Belgrave is that the strategies of showing interest in others, activities typical of persons who are able-bodied, and physical activities are effective in promoting social interaction

between persons who are able-bodied and people with a physical disability.

Belgrave and Mill (1981) investigated the effectiveness of strategies that could be used by a person who is physically disabled to reduce the social handicap of avoidance in initial encounters. The results provide evidence for the strategy of disclosing the disability following an incident regarding it. It was clear that mention of the disability in the absence of an incident involving the disability was not found to be an effective strategy in this study. As suggested by this research, disclosure of the disability may be interpreted as dwelling on the disability rather than indicating an unemotional reaction to it. The important thing, according to Belgrave and Mill, is that the tactic of mentioning the disability in conjunction with a request for assistance was demonstrated to be effective.

In the concluding discussion, it is emphasized that the positive impressions of a person who is disabled do not necessarily mean that a person who is able-bodied will want to interact with a person who is disabled. However, the strategies investigated in this study will provide beneficial information in enabling the physically disabled to take an active role in the minimization of avoidance in first encounters. This study also concludes

that persons who are disabled should not accept a passive and submissive role. Instead, they should become more involved in the social environment around them by creating a dynamic image and displaying behaviors that foster positive attitudes on the part of population who are able-bodied.

Parks and Adelman (1983) undertook a study to examine network and dynamic correlates of uncertainty and stability in premarital romantic relationships. Results generally showed that respondents experienced less uncertainty about their romantic partners and were less inclined to break up when they communicated and received more support from their partners' family and friends, communicated more often with their parents, and perceived greater similarity to their partners. The underlying aim was to expand on uncertainty reduction theory.

Uncertainty reduction processes play a major role in theories of relationship development according to researchers. Belgrave's (1981) study is cited for finding that interpersonal relationships develop as participants reduce uncertainty about each other. A primary goal of this study was to enhance understanding of the development of romantic relationships by expanding Belgrave's theory. Some of the areas that will be discussed include:

- (1) the amount of communication between the individual and the partner's friends and family.
- (2) the extent to which members of the partners' networks express support for the romantic relationship.

This broader thesis was explored by adopting a longitudinal research design. The network and dynamic variables were first utilized to predict uncertainty at two points in time. They were then used along with uncertainty to predict the overall stability of romantic relationships over a three month period. It was presumed that communication with the romantic partner's family and friends should reduce uncertainty and thereby promote relational stability in several ways. The partner's network is a major source of third party information. Members may comment on the partner's past actions and behavioral tendencies. They may supply ready-made explanations for the partner's behavior or serve as sounding boards for the individual's own explanations. Also, the partner's family and friends should be particularly useful since they are likely to have considerable experience with the partner's out-of-role behavior.

Researchers established a sample of 246 student volunteers contacted through undergraduate classes, campus newspaper advertisements, and handbills. The sample

contained equal numbers of males and females who were currently involved in heterosexual romantic relationships but were not living together. The measures of these responses were:

(1) Amount of communication with partner's network. This communication consisted of the proportion of the partner's network contacts that the respondent had met face-to-face, and the average frequency of communication with known members of the partner's network.

(2) Support from partner's networks. Support was measured with a six-item scale regarding the extent to which the partner's families and friends expressed support, labeled the partners as a couple, and included them in their activities.

(3) Amount of communication with partner. Two items were used to assess the amount of communication between the romantic partners. One was the number of days in the last two weeks in which the partners talked in the presence of one another. The other was the percentage of free time that had been spent with the partner during the last two weeks. Higher scores indicated that communication between the partners was more regular and consumed more of their spare time.

(4) Perceived similarity to partner.

(5) Uncertainty was measured with an eight-item scale

by asking the respondents to indicate how much they agreed with statements which include:

I am confident of my ability to accurately predict my dating partner's behavior. I have a very good idea of what my dating partner's values and preferences are.

I often have trouble understanding why my dating partner does what he or she does. I can usually tell what my dating partner is feeling inside.

The results of this study demonstrated both the value and difficulty of examining dynamic and contextual influences at the same time. These researchers were able to show that social network factors were significantly related to both the social cognitive activities of romantic partners and the overall stability of romantic relationships. They were also able to account for a sizable portion of the variance in uncertainty at two points in time and predict breakups in romantic relationships over a three months period with almost 90% accuracy. Their first hypothesis was supported that communication with the partner's network was negatively associated with the individual's level of unpredictability about his or her romantic partner and positively associated with the overall degree of relational stability. The second hypothesis was also supported that individuals who received more support for their romantic relationship

from family and friends experienced less uncertainty at both points in time and were less inclined to terminate their romantic relationship.

The above study can be related to this project in which university students may have social and dating attitudes towards students with physical disabilities. This correlation can probably be closely established in terms of this study's variables in measuring the overall degree of stability within a relationship. For instance, suppose a person who is not disabled becomes romantically involved with an individual with a physical disability while attending university. Based on previous findings from other studies, there is a high probability that this individual who are able-bodied would fear or avoid allowing the person with a physical disability to interact with his or her personal networks. In turn, this would translate into a high degree of uncertainty that an intimate relationship is going to last. Even though this person who is able-bodied may accept the physical disability of his or her romantic partner, other studies reviewed in this section point out that family, relatives, and friends' reactions may not be overly supportive of this relationship.

Relevance of Research

The third area of the literature review focused on

the willingness of students who are able-bodied to pursue social activities, dating, and/or long-term relationships with students who have physical disabilities. Authorities provided findings from various studies which pointed out how family and friends in a support network have a bearing on the success of a relationship. It is likely that family and friends who make an issue of a person's physical disability will have an adverse effect on a relationship. Increasing personal contact and providing additional information about a disability were two ways to improve attitudes of able-bodied persons toward an individual with a physical disability. The issue of personal attractiveness and personal image and how it relates to dating and social relationships was the final area of analysis in the literature review.

Summary Review of Literature

Within the literature review, the issue of individuals who are able-bodied pursuing intimate relationships with a persons who have observable physical disabilities is investigated. Various studies are expounded on regarding how society readily accepts persons with observable physical disabilities. Similarities and differences are noted in the studies involving persons with physical disabilities and its influence on a friendship and possible dating relationships. Education and the portrayal of

people with disabilities in a favorable manner are discussed as ways to alleviate discomfort, fear, and prejudice in individuals who are able-bodied. In turn, this information is put into context involving the establishment of a relationship between persons who are able-bodied and persons with physical disabilities.

Collectively, the review of literature provides important and relevant information to this study. First, research studies on dating and courtship behaviors among university age students demonstrated physical attractiveness as a priority in initiating an intimate relationship with a person of the opposite sex. In addition, other significant behaviors include dating skills and the value placed on the dating relationship. Research studies about attitudes toward people with physical disabilities confirms the presence of prejudice in most persons without physical disabilities towards people who are disabled. Evidence shows that despite improvements in society's attitudes toward people with physical disabilities, prejudice continues to exist.

CHAPTER THREE

Method

Subjects

One hundred and eighty-five undergraduate and graduate students attending California State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB), participated in this study. Eighty subjects were male and 105 subjects were female.

The mean age of the students was 24 years of age. Only four students, who took part in this questionnaire reported that they had a physical disability. According to survey responses, most of the participants were in their third (junior) year at the university. The participants identified with one of the following cultural groups:

Asian, African American, Caucasian, and Hispanic. A few subjects chose other cultural groups. Most subjects, identified with the Caucasian culture (see Table 1).

All subjects were treated in accordance with ethical principles of the American Psychological Association.

Procedure

The purpose of this project was to study the attitudes of university students who are able-bodied towards students with an observable physical disability at CSUSB. The author was interested in researching the following areas:

- 1) The level of comfort with students who have physical disabilities,

- 2) The perceptions of students who have physical disabilities and,
- 3) The willingness to pursue social activities, dating, and/or long term relationships with students who have physical disabilities.

A questionnaire was designed by the investigator of this project to study the attitudes of California State University, San Bernardino students towards other university students with observable physical disabilities such as a paraplegia or blindness. The investigator had to develop an original questionnaire because after completing a comprehensive review of the literature the researcher found a paucity of research instruments.

In developing the questionnaire, the investigator developed questions to explore findings in the following three areas:

- 1) The level of comfort with students who have physical disabilities,
- 2) The perceptions of students who have physical disabilities and,
- 3) The willingness to pursue social activities, dating, and/or long term relationships with students who have physical disabilities.

After developing the initial questionnaire, the investigator conducted a pilot study with ten

Students from CSUSB. In the pilot study, there were the following forms: informed consent, introductory letter for study, demographic form, and a questionnaire consisting of thirty questions. Initial findings of the pilot study led the investigator to combine research areas of "willingness to pursue social and dating activities" and "long-term relationships with students who are physically disabled."

This investigator distributed the revised questionnaire with consent form, demographic form, and introductory letter for the study located (in Appendix A) to both undergraduate and graduate students at CSUSB. Questionnaires were distributed to students in selected university classes during the 1995 winter quarter. In compliance with university regulations, researcher submitted the final questionnaire, informed consent, introductory letter, and demographic form to the Institutional Research Review Board, (I.R.R.B), at CSUSB for approval. The questionnaire, informed consent, introductory letter for the study, and demographic form were approved by the I.R.R.B.

After approval of the I.R.R.B, subjects were then asked to complete the demographic form and the questionnaire of thirty items. A Likert Scale was developed for responses (see Appendix B). The

questionnaire was developed in accordance with American Psychological Association guidelines.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results and Interpretation

The purpose of this project was to study the attitudes of university students who were able-bodied toward students with observable physical disabilities at CSUSB. The investigator was interested in researching the following areas:

- 1) The level of comfort with students who have physical disabilities,
- 2) The perceptions of students who have physical disabilities and,
- 3) The willingness to pursue social activities, dating, and/or long term relationships with students who have physical disabilities.

The comprehensive findings of the thirty-questions from the questionnaire distributed to CSUSB university students indicated a wide range of responses: (see Table 2 Part A and B).

In reference to the level of comfort experienced by university students with students who are physically disabled, question number one, (57%) strongly agreed that "they were comfortable within the presence of students with physical disabilities." On the other hand, there were no students who strongly disagreed with this statement. This result may depict how contemporary

attitudes of people have changed in relation to having persons with physical disabilities in their presence due to more accurate information in the media and classrooms about people with physical disabilities. In question number four, a large percentage of students (70%) strongly agreed that "people with physical disabilities can make contributions to society." This result again shows that contemporary attitudes are favorable toward people with physical disabilities in terms of performing certain tasks that able-bodied people perform. The implication here is that people with physical disabilities are given a level of respect as a result of favorable treatment by the media and public perception. Positive media coverage has been a factor in shaping general society's perception that people with disabilities are worthy and capable individuals.

This awareness of people with physical disabilities being able to function in a similar manner as able-bodied people in society is depicted in the results to question number 27. This question addresses whether a physical disability can be contagious. The majority (68%) strongly disagreed, while a mere (3%) strongly agreed. The public perception has obviously changed towards people with physical disabilities being able to attend school, become employed, and undertaking activities that people without

a disability perform.

In question number 28, slightly less than half of the students (49%) strongly disagreed that "peers attitudes influence decisions in dating students with physical disabilities," while a small contingent (4%) strongly agreed that peers attitudes influence such decisions. In question number 29, slightly less than half of the students (49%) strongly disagreed with the statement that "they would not display a discriminatory attitude toward students with physical disabilities."

These results depict that the majority of university students who accept students with physical disabilities, are comfortable around students with physical disabilities, and possess no discriminatory attitudes towards them. **The first category concerns the level of comfort with students who have physical disabilities: (see Table 3 Part A and B).**

In reference to the questionnaire, in question number one, over half of the respondents (57%) indicated that "they strongly agreed in being comfortable in the presence of students with physical disabilities." It is also pointed out that no students felt a strong level of discomfort regarding students with physical disabilities. It shows that students have become accustom to other students with physical disabilities within the classroom

environment.

In question number seven, a majority of students (46%) strongly disagreed with the statement that "one would not sit next to persons with physical disabilities." This result demonstrates that most students are going to be comfortable sitting next to students with physical disabilities. The majority of students do not feel any negative feelings or prejudice towards students with physical disabilities.

In question number 15, one-third of the students (33%) strongly disagreed with the statement that "one would feel comfortable talking to students with physical disabilities as long as they are not physically attracted." The implication of this result is that respondents are more apt to hold a conversation with someone who has a physical disability as long as the other individual does not pursue a closer, more intimate relationship. In relation to question number 19, asking students if they would date a student with a physical disability, the majority (41%) only fairly agreed, while (11%) strongly agreed and (11%) strongly disagreed. These percentages indicate that students are somewhat hesitant in contemplating a decision to date students with physical disabilities.

The importance of the first category pertaining to

the level of comfort with students who have physical disabilities was that there was no major attempt by students who are able-bodied to avoid personal contact with students who have physical disabilities. Interaction in a classroom setting helps students learn together as well as promotes the inclusion of students with physical disabilities to undertake academic programs. According to the questionnaire, it was determined that a third of the students would not care if students with physical disabilities were attracted to them through socialization. However, students who were able-bodied were resented in their approach to dating students with physical disabilities.

The second category of the questionnaire addresses perceptions towards students with physical disabilities: (see Table 4 Part A and B).

In question number 4, a large segment (70%) strongly agreed that "people with physical disabilities can make a contribution to society." This result can be attributed to contemporary society's acceptance of people with disabilities within public places and positive media coverage. The positive perception of most students are verified by the results of question number 8, that a third of students (33%) strongly agreed, that "people place too much emphasis on the physical characteristics of

persons with physical disabilities." These percentages reflect a level of awareness that discriminatory attitudes and prejudice still exist in society towards people with physical disabilities, even though these particular students do not hold the same discriminatory attitudes.

Results regarding the category of perception towards students with physical disabilities relies on personal discretion. Questionnaire responses indicated students with physical disabilities are readily accepted by students who are able-bodied in a classroom setting. However, students who are able-bodied are inclined to pursue social activities outside the academic environment with other students who are able-bodied. This is a matter of personal choice regarding association with people in social activities.

The third category addresses willingness to pursue social activities, dating, and/or long-term relationships with students who have physical disabilities: (See Table 5 Part A and B).

Question number nine addresses socialization with students who have physical disabilities. Fifty percent of the respondents strongly disagree that "they would avoid socializing with students who have physical disabilities," while a minority (3%) strongly agreed with this statement. This result depicts that most students

are going to socialize with students who have physical disabilities if given an opportunity. In question number 22, almost half of the students (47%) strongly disagreed with the statement that "people with physical disabilities should marry someone with a similar disability." Once again, this result shows that most students do not seem to harbor a discriminatory attitude or negative perception of students with physical disabilities. They also believe that students with physical disabilities can and should marry a person who is able-bodied.

In question number 14, a majority of students (44%) disagreed while 25% strongly disagreed with the statement that "students with physical disabilities are more attractive than students who are able-bodied." This result signifies that students who are able-bodied are likely to date or establish long-term relationships with students who are able-bodied rather than students with physical disabilities. However, this implication appears to be contradicted by the fact that almost a third of the students (31%) disagreed and nearly a quarter of the students (23%) strongly disagreed with the statement that "they would not consider long-term relationships with students who have physical disabilities." Based on these results, the implication is that students who are able-bodied are going to consider dating or establishing

long-term relationships with persons or students with physical disabilities. Yet, this result is placed into question with the results to the statement that students who are able-bodied will feel guilty in declining an invitation for a date from students who have physical disabilities. Twelve percent strongly agreed, (30%) agreed, and (26%) fairly agreed with this statement. This result indicates that a majority of students are still harboring some level of prejudice against other students with physical disabilities when it pertains to dating or intimate relations. This result can imply that students are responding in this manner because of not wanting to express prejudice or discriminatory attitudes toward students with physical disabilities.

The third area of the questionnaire addressed the issue of pursuing social activities in terms of dating and/or long-term relationships with students who have physical disabilities. Within this section, most respondents endorse personal contact with students who have a physical disability. Regarding the issue of marriage with people with physical disabilities, nearly half of the students believe that the individual should make a determination whether or not to marry someone with a similar disability. On a personal level, most CSUSB, respondents prefer dating or establishing an intimate

relationship with a student who is able-bodied. As pointed out in the introduction, education and interaction play an integral role for incorporating people with physical disabilities into American society. These two factors allow students with a physical disability to overcome adversity, raise self-esteem, and contribute to society. However, individuals who are able-bodied are not likely to establish a dating or an intimate relationship with students who have physical disabilities.

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion

The purpose of this research was to determine the social and dating attitudes of university students who are able-bodied towards students with observable physical disabilities at California State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB). The following three areas of social interaction were explored:

- 1) The level of comfort with students who have physical disabilities,
- 2) The perceptions of students who have physical disabilities and,
- 3) The willingness to pursue social activities, dating, and/or long-term relationships with students who have physical disabilities.

Students from CSUSB, were found to be willing to treat and approach students with physical disabilities as equals. One implication of the result was that students who were able-bodied were willing to be friendly and socially interact with university students who had physical disabilities, thus demonstrating that they are not overtly discriminatory towards students with physical disabilities. But, on the other hand, when responding to questions concerning forging an intimate relationship or dating students with physical disabilities, students who were

able-bodied were highly unlikely to pursue such a relationship.

The implications of this low level of discrimination and prejudice in the classroom or on campus can be attributed to the changing social attitudes of Americans towards people with physical disabilities. In the last several decades, people with physical disabilities have gradually established their rights to be treated as equals in society. This changing social situation has allowed people who are able-bodied to learn to respect and treat people with physical disabilities as essentially similar in almost all aspects of relationships. However, when considering the attitudes and behaviors of university students who are able-bodied towards other students with physical disabilities in relation to dating and intimate relationship, a definite, "hidden" prejudice seems to surface.

This "hidden" prejudice may be identified as a lack of understanding possessed by many students who are able-bodied when faced with the prospect of establishing, sustaining, and enjoying a healthy, intimate relationship with students who have physical disabilities. The students in this project expressed a general unwillingness to date or pursue an intimate relationship with students with physical disabilities. Although these same students

expressed no prejudice or feelings of discomfort with people with physical disabilities in almost all situations, the prospect of dating a person with a physical disability becomes a clear an uncomfortable relationship for a person who is able-bodied.

What could cause this hidden, inherent prejudice? The evaluation of the results of this study indicates that students who are able-bodied are more likely to date someone who is similar to themselves rather than students with physical disabilities. The fact that a university student who is able-bodied may feel anxiety about a person who is disabled is clearly demonstrated in this finding. Another possibility is that students who are able-bodied may find disabilities unattractive or an obstacle in pursuing intimate relationships. In other words, these students who are able-bodied may feel that even if he or she is attracted to a person with a physical disability, a long-term intimate relationship cannot be considered because of the unattractiveness, fear, or hindrances presented by that physical disability in a relationship. In addition, nearly a third of the students in the sample strongly agreed with the statement that "they would feel guilty declining an invitation with a person who has a physical disability."

Lack of awareness may contribute to a student who

is able-bodied reluctance's to develop an intimate relationship with another student who is physically disabled. For example, many students may not understand that a woman who has sustained paraplegia may still bear children. Another social misunderstanding may occur when a student feels guilty because they do not accept an invitation from another student with a physical disability. It appears that education and opportunity for social interaction between students who are able-bodied and students who are disabled would improve understanding and communication.

Limitations of Study

One of the limitations of this study was that only 185 male and female students at CSUSB participated. Additional studies need to be completed at other colleges and universities to research social and dating attitudes of these different populations. Additional information on a larger scale will help in drawing correlations between various factors such as educational level and attitudes toward people with physical disabilities. A second limitation was that the general population may differ on various reasons why a person who is able-bodied may not pursue a long-term intimate relationship with a person who has a physical disability. A third limitation was that the researcher did not have a question on the survey

regarding respondent's personal involvement with someone who has a physical disability. This study was limited by the lack of literature on current social and dating attitudes of university students towards students with observable physical disabilities particularly in the area of romantic and intimate relationships.

General Conclusions

Results of this survey indicate that students from CSUSB, who are able-bodied, do not usually have a problem interacting with students who have physical disabilities. Education and interaction allow students to communicate with one another and helps to dismiss misconceptions related to physical disabilities. Additionally, it was noted that people with physical disabilities make contributions to society and that media is instrumental in portraying people with disabilities in a positive manner. On a personal level, CSUSB respondents who were able-bodied indicated a preference to establish a dating or an intimate relationship with a similar student.

APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT

California State University, San Bernardino
5500 University Parkway
San Bernardino, California 92407-2397

Dear Student:

My name is Farida Kazemi. I am a student in the Master's in Rehabilitation Counseling program at CSUSB. I am asking you to please complete a fifteen minute short questionnaire which is part of my master's project. The purpose of this project is to study the social and dating attitudes of university students towards students with observable physical disabilities such as a students with paraplegia in wheel chair or students who are blind.

This consent form does NOT mean that you are bound to participate. Participation is COMPLETELY VOLUNTARY and you MAY discontinue your participation at ANY time. Please do not write your name on the questionnaire as your responses will remain confidential. The completed questionnaires will be kept in a locked desk in my home office. Please give honest responses.

Thank you for assisting me with this research project. I will be happy to share my findings with you. If you would like to receive a brief summary of my findings, Please complete the address section below and submit it to me separate from the questionnaire.

Sincerely,

Farida Kazemi
Rehabilitation Counseling Graduate Student

I would like to review a copy of your findings.

Yes----- No-----

My name and address is as follows:

INTRODUCTORY LETTER FOR STUDY

My name is Farida Kazemi. I am a student in the Master's in Rehabilitation Counseling Program at CSUSB. The purpose of my project is to study the social and dating attitudes of students who are able-bodied towards students with observable physical disabilities such as students with paraplegia in wheel chair or students who are blind.

All returned questionnaires will be remain anonymous. The completed questionnaire will be kept in a locked desk in my home office.

This research project will be supervised by Dr. Margaret Conney and Dr. Patrick Mullen in School of Education. If you have any question about this project please contact Dr. Conney at: 880-5662.

"Thank You"

QUESTIONNAIRE

All students who participated in this study are asked to voluntarily provide the following information. All questions are optional and all answered information will be anonymous.

PLEASE CHECK THE APPROPRIATE RESPONSE.

A) Male ----- Female -----

B) My age group is:

1 ----- under 21 2 ----- 21-29 3 ----- 30-39
4 ----- 40-49 5 ----- 50-59 6 ----- 60-70

C) Are you disabled? Yes ----- No -----

D) My class level is:

1 ----- Freshman 2 ----- Sophomore 3 ----- Junior
4 ----- Senior 5 ----- Other (specify) -----

E) Please check the box which best describes your culture:

1 Asian -----
2 Black -----
3 Caucasian -----
4 Hispanic -----
5 Other culture that you identify with -----

INSTRUCTIONS

Please respond to the following 30 statements by indicating your level of agreement on the Likert Scale with:

1 = strongly agree

2 = agree

3 = fair

4 = disagree

5 = strongly disagree

Please check the appropriate response.

1) I feel comfortable in the class with a student who is physically disabled:

1 -- 2 -- 3 -- 4 -- 5 --

2) I feel comfortable talking to students about their physical disability:

1 -- 2 -- 3 -- 4 -- 5 --

3) I become distracted with a person's disability when I am talking with them:

1 -- 2 -- 3 -- 4 -- 5 --

4) I think students with physical disabilities are able to make contributions to society:

1 -- 2 -- 3 -- 4 -- 5 --

5) Society readily accepts students with physical disabilities:

1 -- 2 -- 3 -- 4 -- 5 --

6) I feel sorry for a student with a physical disability:

1 -- 2 -- 3 -- 4 -- 5 --

7) I sometimes decline to sit next to a student with a physical disability in class:

1 -- 2 -- 3 -- 4 -- 5 --

8) I believe people place too much emphasis on the physical characteristics of a student with a physical disability:

1 -- 2 -- 3 -- 4 -- 5 --

9) I try to avoid socializing with a student who is physically disabled:

1 -- 2 -- 3 -- 4 -- 5 --

10) I believe it is difficult to socialize with a students who has a physical disability:

1 -- 2 -- 3 -- 4 -- 5 --

11) I believe university students with physical disabilities are limited in social activities:

1 -- 2 -- 3 -- 4 -- 5 --

12) I believe a student with a physical disability is considered less active in social activities than a student without a physical disability:

1 -- 2 -- 3 -- 4 -- 5 --

13) I believe a student with a physical disability needs extra help in life:

1 -- 2 -- 3 -- 4 -- 5 --

14) I believe students with physical disabilities are considered more attractive than university students who are able bodied:

1 -- 2 -- 3 -- 4 -- 5 --

15) I feel comfortable talking with a student who has a physical disability as long as he/she is not attracted to me:

1 -- 2 -- 3 -- 4 -- 5 --

16) It would be difficult to accommodate a student with a physical disability on a date because of his/or disability:

1 -- 2 -- 3 -- 4 -- 5 --

17) I may feel guilty if I decline an invitation for a date from a student who has a physical disability:

1 -- 2 -- 3 -- 4 -- 5 --

18) My life will be restricted if I am married to someone who has a physical disability:

1 -- 2 -- 3 -- 4 -- 5 --

19) I am comfortable dating a student with a physical disability:

1 -- 2 -- 3 -- 4 -- 5 --

20) I would not consider a long-term relationship with a student who has a physical disability:

1 -- 2 -- 3 -- 4 -- 5 --

21) I believe students with physical disabilities need to have their own social dating support group in university/college setting:

1 -- 2 -- 3 -- 4 -- 5 --

22) I believe a student with a physical disability
should marry someone who has a similar disability:

1 -- 2 -- 3 -- 4 -- 5 --

23) I believe some students with a physical disability
are limited in having an enjoyable life:

1 -- 2 -- 3 -- 4 -- 5 --

24) I believe university students with physical
disabilities are limited in social activities
due to their disability:

1 -- 2 -- 3 -- 4 -- 5 --

25) Students with physical disability communicate
better with one another since they have something
in common with each other:

1 -- 2 -- 3 -- 4 -- 5 --

26) I would consider having an intimate relationship
with a student who has a physical disability:

1 -- 2 -- 3 -- 4 -- 5 --

27) Sometimes I believe a disability may be
contagious:

1 -- 2 -- 3 -- 4 -- 5 --

28) Attitudes of my peers influence my decision in
dating and socializing with a student who has
a physical disability:

1 -- 2 -- 3 -- 4 -- 5 --

29) I may discriminate against students with
physical disabilities, but I would not display this
attitude:

1 -- 2 -- 3 -- 4 -- 5 --

30) I am not aware of an appropriate way to pursue a
social activity with students having a physical
disability:

1 -- 2 -- 3 -- 4 -- 5 --

"THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION"

APPENDIX B

Results

The following are the comprehensive findings of the thirty-questions from the questionnaire distributed to 185 CSUSB. university students to indirectly inquire about their attitudes towards students with an observable physical disability in these three areas:

- 1) The level of comfort with students who have physical disabilities,
- 2) The perceptions of students who have physical disabilities and,
- 3) The willingness to pursue social activities, dating, and/or long term relationships with students who have physical disabilities.

The researcher developed 10 questions in each of the three areas discussed in the above paragraph. The researcher also organized all 30 questions according to content and relation of each question to each other. The result of each three areas are as follows:

1) Level of comfort with students who have physical disabilities

In question number 1, "I feel comfortable in the class with a student who is physically disabled:"

(57%) of the students strongly agreed.

(32%) agreed.

(8%) checked fair respond.

(0%) strongly disagreed.

In question number 2, "I feel comfortable talking to students about their physical disability:"

(20%) strongly agreed.

(28%) checked fair respond.

(21%) disagreed.

(4%) strongly disagreed.

In question number 7, "I sometimes decline to sit next to a student with physical disability in class:"

(4%) strongly agreed.

(10%) agreed.

(11%) checked fair respond.

(29%) disagreed.

(46%) strongly disagreed.

In question number 10, "I believe it is difficult to socialize with someone who has a physical disability:"

(2%) strongly agreed.

(9%) agreed.

(18%) responded fair.

(30%) disagreed.

(41%) strongly disagreed.

In question number 15, "I feel comfortable talking with a student who is physically disabled as long as they are not attracted:"

(3%) strongly agreed.
(10%) agreed.
(28%) responded fair.
(26%) disagreed.
(33%) strongly disagreed.

In question number 18, "My life will be restricted if I am married to someone who has a physical disability:"

(12%) strongly agreed.
(31%) agreed.
(21%) responded fair.
(9%) disagreed.
(22%) strongly disagreed.

In question number 19, "I am comfortable dating a student with a physical disability:"

(11%) strongly agreed.
(18%) agreed.
(41%) responded fair.
(19%) disagreed.
(11%) strongly disagreed.

In question number 25, "Students with a physical disability communicate better with one another since they have something in common with each other:"

(8%) strongly agreed.
(22%) agreed.
(34%) responded fair.

(25%) disagreed.

(11%) strongly disagreed.

In question number 28, "Attitudes of my peers influence my decision in dating and socializing with a student who is physically disabled:"

(4%) strongly agreed.

(11%) agreed.

(13%) responded fair.

(23%) disagreed.

(49%) strongly disagreed.

In question number 29, "I am discriminate against students with a physical disability, but I would not display this attitude:"

(7%) strongly agreed.

(8%) agreed.

(12%) responded fair.

(24%) disagreed.

(49%) strongly disagreed.

2) Perceptions of students who have physical disabilities

In question number 3, "I become distracted with a person's physical disability when I am talking with them:"

(7%) strongly agreed.

(16%) responded fair.

(36%) disagreed.

(14%) strongly disagreed.

In question number 4, "I think students with physical disabilities are able to make contribution to society:"

(70%) strongly agreed.

(18%) agreed.

(6%) responded fair.

(3%) disagreed.

(3%) strongly disagreed.

In question number 5, "Society readily accepts students with physical disabilities:"

(6%) strongly agreed.

(16%) agreed.

(37%) responded fair.

(32%) disagreed.

(9%) strongly disagreed.

In question number 8, "I believe people place too much emphasis on the physical characteristics of a student with a physical disability:"

(32%) strongly agreed.

(33%) agreed.

(19%) responded fair.

(10%) disagreed.

(6%) strongly disagreed.

In question number 11, "I believe university students with physical disabilities are limited in social activities:"

(10%) strongly agreed.

(31%) agreed.

(30%) responded fair.

(17%) disagreed.

(12%) strongly disagreed.

In question number 12, "I believe a student with a physical disability is considered less active in social activities than a student without a physical disability:"

(15%) strongly agreed.

(30%) agreed.

(25%) responded fair.

(21%) disagreed.

(9%) strongly disagreed.

In question number 13, "I believe a student with a physical disability needs extra help in life:"

(8%) strongly agreed.

(28%) agreed.

(38%) responded fair.

(21%) disagreed.

(6%) strongly disagreed.

In question number 23, "I believe some students with a physical disability are limited in having an enjoyable life:"

(6%) strongly agreed.

(16%) agreed.

(22%) responded fair.

(30%) disagreed.

(26%) strongly disagreed.

In question number 24, "I believe university students with a physical disability are limited in social activities due to their disability:"

(7%) strongly agreed.

(30%) agreed.

(27%) responded fair.

(26%) disagreed.

(10%) strongly disagreed.

In question number 27, "Sometimes I believe a disability may be contagious:"

(3%) strongly agreed.

(4%) agreed.

(9%) responded fair.

(16%) disagreed.

(68%) strongly disagreed

3) Willingness to pursue social activities, dating, and/or long-term relationships with students who have physical disabilities

In question number 6, "I feel sorry for a student with a physical disability:"

(12%) strongly agreed.

(20%) agreed.

(33%) responded fair.
(25%) disagreed.
(10%) strongly disagreed.

In question number 9, "I try to avoid socializing with a student who is physically disabled:"

(3%) strongly agreed.
(6%) agreed.
(11%) responded fair.
(30%) disagreed.
(50%) strongly disagreed.

In question number 14, I believe students with physical disabilities are considered more attractive than university students who are not disabled:"

(2%) strongly agreed.
(4%) agreed.
(25%) responded fair.
(44%) disagreed.
(25%) strongly disagreed.

In question number 16, "It would be difficult to accommodate a student who is physically disabled on a date because of his or her disability:"

(1%) strongly agreed.
(22%) agreed.
(30%) responded fair.
(26%) disagreed.

(21%) strongly disagreed.

In question number 17, "I may feel guilty if I decline an invitation for a date from a student who has a physical disability:"

(12%) strongly agreed.

(30%) agreed.

(26%) responded fair.

(17%) disagreed.

(15%) strongly disagreed.

In question number 20, "I would not consider a long-term relationship with a student who has a physical disability:"

(6%) strongly agreed.

(14%) agreed.

(26%) responded fair.

(31%) disagreed.

(23%) strongly disagreed.

In question number 21, "I believe students with physical disabilities need to have their own social dating support group in university/college setting:"

(8%) strongly agreed.

(16%) agreed.

(22%) responded fair.

(30%) disagreed.

(24%) strongly disagreed.

In question number 22, "I believe a student with a physical disability should marry someone who has a similar disability:"

- (2%) strongly agreed.
- (5%) agreed.
- (12%) responded fair.
- (34%) disagreed.
- (47%) strongly disagreed.

In question number 26, "I would consider having an intimate relationship with a student who has a physical disability:"

- (11%) strongly agreed.
- (21%) agreed.
- (31%) responded fair.
- (26%) disagreed.
- (11%) strongly disagreed.

In question number 30, "I am not aware of an appropriate way to pursue a social activity with students having a physical disability:"

- (10%) strongly agreed.
- (20%) agreed.
- (31%) responded fair.
- (17%) disagreed.
- (22%) strongly disagreed.

Table 1 (Part A)

Demographics of University Students who Participated
in this Study

Statements	Responses
Number of subjects participated (n = 185)	
Gender of subjects	80 subjects Male 105 subjects Female
Age group of subjects	33 subjects under 21 years of age 105 subjects between age of 21-29 27 subjects between age of 30-39 18 subjects between age of 40-49 4 subjects between age of 50-59
Subjects reported physical disability	4 subjects with a physical disability

Continuous Table 1 (Part B)

	184 subjects without a physical disability
University class level	14 subjects were freshman
	21 subjects were sophomore
	61 subjects were junior
	60 subjects were senior
	29 subjects were graduate
Reported cultural background of subjects	21 subjects were Asian
	26 subjects were African American
	87 subjects were Caucasian
	43 subjects were other culture

Table 2 (Part A)

The Comprehensive Findings of the Thirty Questions
from the Questionnaire where there were Wide Range
of Answers

Statements	Responses
Feeling of comfort with a student who is physically disabled	1 --2 --3 --4 --5 57% 32% 8% 3% 0%
Contribution of students with physical disability to the society	1 --2 --3 --4 --5 70% 18% 6% 3% 3%
Students believe that a physical disability can be contagious	1 --2 --3 --4 --5 3% 4% 9% 16% 68%
Peers attitudes influences decisions in dating a student with a physical disability	1 --2 --3 --4 --5 4% 11% 13% 23% 49%

Continuous Table 2 (Part B)

not displaying	1	--2	--3	--4	--5
discrimination against	7%	8%	12%	24%	49%
students with physical					
disability					

1=strongly agree 2=agree 3=fair 4=disagree

5=strongly disagree %=percentage of answers

Table 3 (Part A)

Answers that Indicated a Wide Range of Responses
in Student's Level of Comfort with Students who
Have Physical Disabilities

Statements	Responses
Feeling of comfort with a student who physically disabled	1 --2 --3 --4 --5 57% 32% 8% 3% 0%
Declining to sit next to a student with a physical disability	1 --2 --3 --4 --5 4% 10% 11% 29% 46%
Feeling comfortable talking to a student with a physical disability	1 --2 --3 --4 --5 3% 10% 28% 26% 33%
Comfortable dating a student who is physically disabled	1 --2 --3 --4 --5 11% 18% 41% 19% 11%

Continuous Table 3 (Part B)

Peers attitudes	1	--2	--3	--4	--5
influences decisions	4%	11%	13%	23%	49%
in dating a student with					
a physical disability					

Not displaying	1	--2	--3	--4	--5
discrimination	4%	11%	13%	23%	49%
against students with					
physical disability					

1=strongly agree 2=agree 3=fair 4=disagree
5=strongly disagree %=percentage of answers

Table 4 (Part A)

Answers that Indicated a Strong Range of Responses
in Student's Perceptions with Students who Have
Physical Disabilities

Statements	Responses
Contribution of students with physical disability to society:	1 --2 --3 -- 4 --5 70% 18% 6% 3% 3%
People place too much characteristics of a student with a physical disability	1 --2 --3 --4 --5 32% 33% 19% 10% 6%
University students with a physical disability are limited in social activities	1 --2 --3 --4 --5 10% 31% 30% 17% 12%

Continuous Table 4 (Part B)

University students	1	--2	--3	--	4	--5
with a physical	7%	30%	27%	26%	10%	
disability are limited						
in social activities						
due to their disability						
Students believe that	1	--2	--3	--4	--5	
a disability can be	3%	4%	9%	16%	68%	
contagious						
Students believe that	1	--2	--3	--4	--5	
a student with a physical	15%	30%	31%	17%	12%	
disability is considered						
less active in social activities						

1=strongly agree 2=agree 3=fair 4=disagree
 5=strongly disagree %=percentage of answers

Table 5 (Part A)

Answers that Indicated a Different Range in Responses
in Willingness to pursue Social Activity, Dating,
and/or Long-term Relationships with Students who
Have Physical Disabilities

Statements	Responses
Students avoid socializing with a person with a physical disability	1 --2 --3 --4 --5 3% 6% 11% 30% 50%
Students believe that a physically disabled student should marry someone with a similar disability	1 --2 --3 --4 --5 2% 5% 12% 34% 47%
Students believe that a student with a physical disability is more attractive than a able-bodied student	1 --2 --3 --4 --5 2% 4% 25% 44% 25%

Continuous Table 5 (Part B)

students who will	1	--2	--3	--4	--5
not consider a	6%	14%	26%	31%	23%
long-term relationship					
with a student who is					
physically disabled					

Feeling guilty if	1	--2	--3	--4	--5
decline an invitation	12%	30%	26%	17%	15%
for a date from a					
student who has a physical					
disability					

1=strongly agree 2=agree 3=fair 4=disagree
 5=strongly disagree %=percentage of answers

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